

MAN'S HOPE DESTROYED BY THE DEATH OF THE YOUNG.

A

S E R M O N ,

PREACHED ON THE SABBATH FOLLOWING

THE DEATH OF MISS SUSAN M. THAYER,

AGED 20 YEARS,

IN FRANKLIN, MASS.

DECEMBER 15, 1844.

BY THE PASTOR, TERTIUS D. SOUTHWORTH, A. M.

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S E R M O N .

‘And thou destroyest the hope of man.’ Job 14: 19.

THE text and context contains a complaint of Job, in view of God’s severity towards man; and, particularly, as he imagined, against himself.

‘For now thou numberest my steps; dost thou not watch over my sin? My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity.’ Here he complains of the particular hardships he apprehended himself under, from the strictness of God’s justice.

One thus comments upon this. ‘For now thou seemest to me to number my steps, and watch over my sin, and seal it up in a bag, as bills of indictment are kept safe, to be produced against the prisoner.’ In the remainder of this chapter, Job complains of the wasting, frail, and dying condition of man in this perishing world.

This he illustrates by striking figures taken from nature. ‘And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place. The waters wear the stones: thou wastest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man. Thou prevail-est forever against him, and he passeth: thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away. His sons come to honor, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them. But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn.’ But the chief and most affecting point in his complaint is contained in the text:—‘Thou destroyest the hope of man;’ that is, by death, as the context shows.

I suppose, since Job was a man of piety, and had hope in regard to the future world, that by hope, here, he had respect to

worldly expectations. These all perish when a man dies. This is true of men in general, and in every season of life. But as persons who are in the morning of life cherish higher expectations, and are more sanguine in hope; and as those more advanced in life, and the world at large, entertain strong expectations respecting them, and confidently trust in them for future support; therefore, when such are removed, the words of the text receive an emphasis: 'Thou destroyest the hope of man.' As these expressive words were poured forth from the mouth of Job at the same breath with his complaint in view of the divine severity for sin, manifested in cutting off man from the earth in the midst of his hopes, we are led to consider this proposition: God destroys the hope of man by the death of the young, and thereby shows his severity for sin.

I. It may be well, in the first place, to refer to the fact, that it is God who takes away or recalls the life of man.

Men are too prone to overlook the divine agency in this event, and to refer it to second causes. Hence it has become common to speak only of these in reference to the cause of death. They mention only the fever, the consumption, the paralysis, the accident, the catastrophe, as the cause of death. But God, the first cause, the efficient agent, is passed over in silence, as though so important an event could transpire without him. But if *this* event could, or even the smallest imaginable, then *all* could, which would lead directly to atheism. The Bible teaches the contrary doctrine, and shows that when one dies, it is God who has recalled the life which he gave. He declares this himself. 'I kill, and I make alive.' And the sacred writers assert the same. 'The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.' 'And thou destroyest the hope of man.' It is an act of justice,—it is an instance of piety, to acknowledge God as having in his hands the issues of life and death. But it is injustice and impiety not to acknowledge him in this manner. It would be practically shutting him out of the world which he has made, and in which, as it is written in his word, '*he worketh all things.*'

It is wrong thus to overlook and deny the divine agency in

death. When any die by means of disease or accident, we ought to acknowledge that it is God, who has recalled the life, which he gave; and that diseases and accidents are only secondary causes,—the means, by which he effects his purpose,—servants, that do his bidding. Piety dictates this expression: ‘The Lord gave life, and the Lord hath taken it away.’

When our neighbors and friends are removed, by whatever means,—and those on whom we place the greatest dependence, from whom we have the highest expectations, and respecting whom we cherish the most confident hopes are taken away,—we ought to acknowledge God’s hand, and say, It is the Lord, that has done it. And not with murmuring, but with Christian submission, say unto him, ‘Thou destroyest the hope of man.’

II. But let us inquire, in the second place, in what respect it is true, that he destroys the hope of man by the death of the young. It is true, inasmuch as the young are emphatically the *hope* of the world. They are so in the family and the social circle, in the community, in the department of instruction, legislation, and defence. And it is true, since the *young live chiefly by hope*.

1. When the young and promising are removed by death, God strikes a blow at the foundation of a *nation’s hope*. The fair and flourishing tree is smitten at the root, and it bends its head and droops.

The nation *confides* in those, who are on the stage of active life, in meridian years, bearing up the pillars of the national edifice,—giving laws, sustaining and defending, and imparting instruction; but the nation *hopes* in those that are young, that they will soon take the place of those who are bearing the heat and burden of the day, in all the departments of social life, instruction, legislation, government, and defence. Who are to be the future *legislators* for the nation? They who are *now* engaged in this important department, are in the meridian of life, and some of them fast declining into the vale of age, and cannot occupy their present station long. Their wisdom will decline with the increase of years. At any rate, ‘when a few years are come, then they shall go the way, whence they shall

not return.' And then it is expected that they, who are now young, will stand in their stead, and occupy their places in the halls of legislation. Therefore, when any of these are removed by death, the nation sustains a loss, and experiences a blight in some of her most promising hopes. And where are the *rulers*, who are to stand in the place of the present incumbents, who will shortly vacate their office for others? for most of their heads are sprinkled over with the tokens of age, giving warning that they can hold the staff of government but a little longer. The eyes of the nation are turned towards the young with strong expectation, that they will take upon their shoulders the burdens of governmental office. But if these die before the meridian of life, the eyes of the nation will fail in their expectation. The nation also looks to the youth and expects them to be her bulwarks of defence; she expects them to defend her rights and redress her wrongs. She expects that in the dire alternative of war, the youth will gird on the sword, march forth into the field and fight her battles. This is the ordinary course. When Ben-hadad, king of Syria, came against Israel with a great multitude, the Lord promised to deliver that multitude into the hands of the king of Israel. 'But Ahab said, By whom?' It was answered, 'Thus saith the Lord, Even by the *young men* of the princes of the provinces.' Accordingly, a nation always looks to her young men for defence in time of invasion and trouble. When the alarm of war is given, she turns involuntarily to the young men, who are strong, with confident hope. When, therefore, these fall in death, the nation's right arm is cut off, and she stands a defenceless trunk. And her power is weakened by every single one, that falls.

'It is as when an armor-bearer fainteth.'

And the nation hopes in the youth for the *instructors* of the coming generation. They, who now fill these important, difficult, and honorable stations, will occupy them but a short time longer; others must succeed them, or their places will remain vacant. All eyes are towards the young, in hope that their life will be spared, and they advance and take these stations. They hope that they will come into our school-rooms as teachers, into

our academies as preceptors, and into our colleges as tutors, professors, and presidents. And the religious community look to their ranks for the future incumbents of the priesthood in the church of the living God, and hope that, as the fathers are caught away to heaven, the falling mantles of these Elijahs will fall on the young Elishas, who in their turn, shall go forth and feed the flocks of Israel with knowledge and understanding. How sad a thing it is, then, for a nation, or a people, when any of their choice and promising youth are snatched away by death! It is a public loss,—a national bereavement, and well may the nation mourn. And the young also are expected to be the future fathers and mothers of the generation unborn, to mould and guide them.

2. When the young die, God destroys *parental* hopes; for it is usually true in such a case, that parents are left behind. It is emphatically true, that children are the *hope* of parents. They are looking to them to be their support and solace in time of age. They cling to life, and hope that God will spare them to a good old age; and in that case, they will need others, who are young, to sustain and comfort them; and these they fondly hope will be their own children. They hope, too, that their children will live before them, as respected and useful citizens, and members of the community, and beloved friends, and as a crown of honor to their hoary heads. And they tenderly cherish the hope that when they die, their children will lay them in the grave, and will succeed to their habitations, and places, and possessions, and will remain to bear up their names, and cherish their memory in the fondest and most grateful recollection. But if their children die before them in their youth, all these expectations perish. What weight of meaning, then, have the words of the text: ‘Thou destroyest the hope of man!’ Their hearts bleed with anguish. Darkness clouds their earthly prospects, and gloom settles upon them. They mourn sore, like doves. They go bowed down heavily. They often refuse to be comforted; and say, For I will go down into the grave, unto my children, mourning. Many parents, crushed in hopes, grieve away the sad remnant of their days. It is a great trial for children to lose their parents; but it is a far greater affliction for

parents to lose their children ; chiefly on account of the disappointment of their expectations, and the flow of parental affection stanch'd by the removal of the fond objects. Parents live again in their children. Their love twines around them as the tendrils of the vine round its supporter. And when their children fall and die, they fall with them, and often do but half survive the shock.

Thus when the young and promising die, neighborhoods, communities, the nation, and parents suffer loss, and experience disappointment in their fondest and highest hopes. For the young are the expectation of the nation, and the hope and joy of parents.

3. But the most trying and afflicting of all is the destruction of the hopes of the young themselves, when they are called to die.

Youth is the season of hope, as much as the spring is the time of buds and blossoms. Youth is full of them. Hope is the being of the young. They cannot *live* without it. They live and move and breathe amidst the buds and blossoms of expectation. Their eyes dwell upon the opening buds and blooming flowers, and their senses are regaled by the fragrant odors. They live not in the sober and truthful present, but in the unreal and fanciful future. Their fancy spreads out before them a scene of pleasure and gratified expectations. The sun ever shines on that fairy land—no clouds intervene—and no storms arise. And when one round of happiness has passed, their imagination can see another to succeed, and another still, in endless succession. Hope, gladsome Hope, promises them every worldly good they desire. They hope to love and to be loved. They hope to be connected in the most endearing relation with those who shall be all they could wish. Their angels shall have no spots. They hope for honorable connections. They hope for affluence and ease. They hope for honors and fame. They hope for long life and a happy old age. They hope that smiling joy shall be their constant attendant. Such are their cheering hopes and bright expectations. But let a youth be called to die while standing in this enchanting scene,—as they often are,—and what a sad change comes over his prospects! What dark clouds, and thick gloom, settle over the fascinating panorama! A withering blight passes over all his fair and blos-

soming hopes. The leaves are withered and sere, and scattered around by desolating winds. Nothing now remains but desolation, of all that bright and fascinating scene. Death approaching, as a mighty Destroyer, has, by one fell sweep, entirely cut down every earthly expectation, and blasted every hope. Say not that I speak extravagantly, — that I have drawn a fancy picture overwrought. Ah! would that it were true! 'Tis no imaginative sketch; but what often occurs; and, young friends, it has just happened in your very midst. Your eyes are not dry from weeping over the desolation of the fond expectations of one of your companions. And what was true of her in regard to the destruction of earthly anticipations, is true of all the young when called to die. For the immediate prospect of death brings a blight upon all their worldly hopes. His approach is the signal for all the gay and fascinating visions, which their teeming imaginations had conjured up, to vanish.

III. I remark, in the third place, that *God shows his severity for sin*, when he destroys the hope of man by the death of the young.

There are those, who hardly admit this feature to have place in the character of God, so prone are they to dwell only on his goodness. But the Bible plainly teaches us, that this is not the whole of his character, but that there are mingled with this severe attributes. To make only one reference: Paul says, ‘Behold, therefore, the goodness and *severity* of God: on them which fell *severity*.’ All that in God, which relates to justice, and leads to the punishment of transgressors, and induces him to bring evil and suffering upon his creatures, goes under the general name of severity. So when God destroys the hope of man by the death of the young, it may properly be said, he shows his severity for sin. For it is on account of this, and this alone, that he ever exhibits this character. He showed it in casting out Satan and his adherents from heaven, when they rebelled against his throne. He showed it, in a very marked manner, when he drove the first parents of the race from the garden of Eden — the happy Paradise — because they ate the forbidden fruit; and he cursed the ground for their sake. He showed his severity in a

terrible manner, by bringing the flood upon the world of the ungodly. Also by the destruction of the Canaanites, and by the oft-repeated punishment of his own chosen people. He showed it in a way that astonished heaven, earth, and hell, when he unsheathed the sword of justice against his well-beloved Son, as he stood in the place of sinners. He shows it in all the desolating judgments, which sweep over our guilty world. And he shows his severity in a most affecting manner, when he destroys the hope of man by the death of the young.

It is *severe*, — as we have defined it, — that a *nation* is bereaved of her promising youth, and her expectation from these, cut off. It is *severer*, when *parents* are bereaved of their children, and bury all their fond anticipations of them in their graves. But it is *severest*, when the young *themselves* suffer the disappointment of their fondly cherished expectations, and are called to relinquish, forever, all they hold dear on earth. But it is none too severe, when viewed in the light of its procuring cause, — sin. Were it not for this, God would never bring any, even the smallest, evil upon men; much less would he inflict the greatest.

Having said what was intended in illustration of the sentiment proposed, I will invite your attention to some inferences and reflections.

1. It may be proper to remark, in the first place, — and I deem it suitable to do so, — in connection with this subject, that there is occasion for gratitude, that so few of the youth of our community have been called away from the living, for the past six years. As a Society, as neighborhoods, and friendly and family circles, we ought to record it in grateful remembrance of the divine goodness to us, that we so seldom have been called to mourn the early departure of our beloved youth. From the *youthful circle*, especially, is demanded a tribute of thankfulness, that death has so rarely broken in upon their number. Death has been comparatively rare among you. Your ranks have for the most time been unbroken. While large numbers of other ages have fallen, you have stood. While death has stricken down the aged and the infants, you have been spared. This

fact ought to be noted by you, in gratitude to God, your preserver. And how can you show your gratitude to him, but by cheerful obedience to his will? And how can you enter upon a course of obedience, but by beginning with the exercise of repentance and faith? God's sparing mercy, and your exemption from death, demand your gratitude, and love, and obedience. Oh! hasten, then, to render these, which will be a pleasing tribute to his name.

2. This subject shows, in a striking manner, that God is the supreme Arbiter of men. The Scriptures assert, that it belongs to God to dispose of men, and every thing that pertains to them, just as it seems good in his sight. He disposes of the *destinies* of men. 'He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.' 'The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.' 'None can stay his hand.' And he exercises this prerogative of his throne, in his daily providence among men. He does it in every gift of his hand, and in every bereavement; he does it in every blessing he confers, or recalls; he does it when he gives life, and when he takes it back again; he does it by his goodness, and by his severity; and he does it in a very marked and afflicting manner, when he destroys the hope of man by the death of the young, blighting a nation's expectations, parents' fondly cherished anticipations, and disappointing the hopes of those who were looking for much happiness on earth, and promising themselves long years of pleasure here. Stop, ye careless ones, and consider what is done! What desolations are spread around! How the smitten hearts bleed over expectations blasted, and expiring hopes! But it is God, that has done this, which is his strange work, evincing the prerogative of his throne, in disposing of the destinies of men.

3. This subject is adapted to teach the evil nature of sin, and show its desert. It is for *sin* that God destroys the hope of man. It cannot, then, be a slight evil, a trivial offence. God is not unjust, and does not inflict a greater punishment than men deserve. He proportions this to the desert; if he does not fully in this world, undoubtedly he will in the future. Let, then, the

desert of sin be measured by the evil God brings upon men, when he destroys their hope by the death of the young. And what an overwhelming affliction is this! How great, then, is the evil of sin, — and behold its desert. But there is not room in this world, for God to punish according to the full desert of sin. This is reserved for the eternal world. But here, when God destroys the hope of men, and brings the heaviest troubles upon them which they can bear, they may truly say,

‘That when his strokes are felt,
His strokes are fewer than our crimes,
And lighter than our guilt.’

But still they may serve to afford us some just conceptions of the sinfulness of sin.

4. If God shows so much severity for sin in this world of probation, when he destroys the hope of man by the death of the young, what will be the severity which he will show in the future world of retribution! This being a time of trial, it is implied that retribution is reserved for the future, when the trial is passed; but does not take place here. It is only, as it were, occasionally, and lightly, that God punishes men here. He does not, nor can he punish men adequately for their sins here. But in the future world of retribution he can, and has given his word that he will, thus punish the wicked. And if here, in this confined space, he shows so much severity when he destroys the hope of man, what language can describe the severity which he will manifest on sinners in that world, where space, nor time, can limit the exercise of his severity? There, he will pour out upon them the full vials of his wrath. And let it be remembered, that his destroying the hope of man for this world, is an earnest that he will destroy the hopes of the wicked for the world to come. We are told, that the expectation of the wicked shall perish, when they die. Then all their vain hopes will vanish, ‘for the hail of divine wrath shall sweep away their refuge of lies, and the waters of his indignation shall overflow the hiding-place.’ And if so great suffering is the consequence of the destruction of hope, which pertains to this world, what will it be, when every hope in the future world shall be entirely cut off? No hope — *no hope* — will be the key-note in the wailing of their misery.

5. In view of what has been said, we perceive why there is so excessive grief when the young die. This is a remarkable fact. When a youth dies, there is a general burst of grief. The fountains of sympathy are broken up, and every eye pours forth streams of excessive sorrow. Why is this? It is because of the ravages, that are made among men's hopes. The expectations of parents are cut off. Early friendships, which are the most deep, and sincere, and ardent, are broken up; and because the living youth know that the dead have experienced the entire destruction of all those pleasing hopes, that now cheer them, but which may, in like manner, soon perish. Then there is a deep and intimate sympathy with the departed.

6. We may learn, also, from this subject, why it is so hard for the young to die. It is because the season of youth is peculiarly the season of hope; the morning of life is made up of bright and fondly cherished hopes. There is nothing that men relinquish with more reluctance than hope. But when the young die, they relinquish a *world* of hope, numberless expectations, and all dear to them and tenderly embraced. How hard, then, must it be for them to die, and give up every worldly expectation! We find it is so. There is nothing they think of with so much dread, as of dying and leaving all they hold dear in this world; relinquishing every joy and pleasure, which they had confidently expected to possess. All this was realized by her, whose mortal remains were but yesterday borne to the narrow house. Full of hope and promise, and just blooming into womanhood, when her highest and most passionately cherished anticipations she confidently expected were about to be enjoyed, she was called to think of death, the destruction of them all. It was hard for her to die.

7. This subject, and the occasion which called it forth, ring a note of alarm in the ear of careless youth. I have thought, for some time, of preaching a sermon exclusively to you; but God has anticipated me, and, by the voice of his providence, read a lecture in your hearing, of the most solemn and alarming import. He has lately broken in upon your ranks, by sending death among your numbers, to mow your glory down; to bring to the dust your proud and high looks. God has spoken once

— yea, twice — yes, thrice, within as many months, by calling your female associates and friends from your companionship, to go the way of all the earth, and become the associates of disembodied spirits. He spake once, but ye heard not; he spake twice, but ye did not regard it; and now again, in thunder notes, he speaks. SUSAN THAYER, your acquaintance, your associate, your friend, he has smitten down by your side. As young, as beautiful, as promising as yourselves; as sprightly, as gay, as full of hope, — as buoyant with expectation of earthly joys, as any of you. All that was promising, and beautiful, and interesting in her, did not shield her from the arrow of death. And what security have *you*, then, from the same arrow? You are equally exposed, and may soon and suddenly fall. When God begins, we may expect he will make thorough work. He has begun to thin your ranks — three have already fallen — and now another, as fair as the fairest, lies smitten by disease, on a bed of languishing and pain. And who next will be called, is known only to him, who holds in his hands the destinies of all.

S. And, finally, if it is God who recalls life, and thereby destroys the hope of man, then may we know where to look for comfort, when friends die. It is to God; ‘for he killeth, and maketh alive; he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole.’ They, therefore, who are afflicted by the recent death, and have suffered the disappointment of expectations, should look to God for help. Particularly should he, who stands as mourner not from motives of natural relation, but from ties of dearer and stronger affection. In the removal of your friend, you have a striking example of the destruction of hope. Your expectations of connubial happiness with the deceased are forever cut off. Your disappointment in the object of your ardent hope should lead you to seek happiness where you cannot suffer disappointment. Seek an interest in the salvation of the gospel. In that you will find

‘A sovereign balm for every wound,
A cordial for your fears.’

If you shall heartily embrace it, and with confiding hope repair

to God for consolation, this bereavement will be a thousand-fold compensated by the enjoyment of God. Then this affliction, and every earthly trial, will be made light, and 'will work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

May the parents, and sisters, and brothers, know where true comfort is to be found, in this time of afflictive visitation. Be persuaded, my friends, to look for support and alleviation, to the source whence your affliction came. He can bind up your broken hearts, heal every wound, and wipe away your tears. Have you reverence and love for God in your hearts, and reconciliation to his holy will? Then you may look upon your affliction as coming from the hand of kindness; 'for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.' Then, though it be his own hand that hath done it, yet you may be assured it is done for your good; and while you suffer, you will still be the objects of his kind regard and compassion. 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.'

THE following Hymn, written for the occasion, by Mrs. L. DEAN, was sung with much effect at the burial of the deceased, by a portion of the Choir, among whom were her intimate associates : —

LIFE 's toil is o'er ! Its storm is past ;
And all is calm, is still, at last !
The flower long withering now lies crushed,
And hopes and fears alike are hushed.

To fade, to die ! to die so young,
And leave thy harp of love unstrung,*
When fancy painted joys so high,
Was it not hard, most hard, to die ?

Was it not hard so young to die ?
So loved, to break the kindred tie ?
To leave thy natal home, and part
With cherished treasures of the heart ?

Through nights of anguish, days of pain,
Thou, lovely sufferer, looked in vain
For ease and health ; yet not a word
Of murmuring from thy lip was heard.

Rest, maiden ! rest thy weary head,
In the low mansion of the dead !
With thy *twin-sister*, gone before,
How sweet to worship and adore !

* Alluding to her espousal.

